

**Original citation:**

Brassett, V. and Rosedale, C. (2010). The performance of global democracy : parody and/as the political. [Coventry] : Centre for the Study of Globalisation and Regionalisation, University of Warwick. (Working Papers, no. 269)

**Permanent WRAP url:**

<http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/49067>

**Copyright and reuse:**

The Warwick Research Archive Portal (WRAP) makes the work of researchers of the University of Warwick available open access under the following conditions. Copyright © and all moral rights to the version of the paper presented here belong to the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. To the extent reasonable and practicable the material made available in WRAP has been checked for eligibility before being made available.

Copies of full items can be used for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge. Provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way.

**Publisher's statement:****A note on versions:**

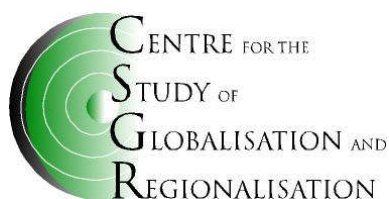
The version presented here is a working paper or pre-print that may be later published elsewhere. If a published version is known of, the above WRAP url will contain details on finding it.

For more information, please contact the WRAP Team at: [wrap@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:wrap@warwick.ac.uk)

The logo for Warwick Publications Wrap, consisting of a dark rectangular box. Inside, the text "warwickpublicationswrap" is written in a white, lowercase, sans-serif font. Below this text is a yellow horizontal line with a slight upward curve in the center. Underneath the line, the phrase "highlight your research" is written in a smaller, white, lowercase, sans-serif font.

warwickpublicationswrap  
highlight your research

<http://go.warwick.ac.uk/lib-publications>



# **The Performance of Global Democracy: Parody and/as the Political**

James Brassett and Chris Rosedale  
Politics and International Studies  
The University of Warwick  
[James.Brassett@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:James.Brassett@warwick.ac.uk)

**CSGR Working Paper 269/10**

**Centre for the Study of Globalisation and Regionalisation**

**Department of Politics and International Studies**

**University of Warwick**

# The Performance of Global Democracy: Parody and/as the Political

James Brassett and Chris Rossdale<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

The article develops a critical analysis of the debate on global democracy. Departing from common post-structural IR critiques of global democracy as (merely) a metaphor of escape that entrenches many of the sovereign logics it claims to contest, we explore what it would mean to engage the discourse of global democracy as an ongoing performative practice. After briefly outlining the relative positions of liberal reformist and cosmopolitan democrats – we argue that more attention can/should be paid to the ontological foundations of global democracy. Drawing from William Connolly and Judith Butler, it is argued that fundamental (democratic) limits of the discourse are overlooked/re-produced, and even in the more ambitious cosmopolitan positions. Ontological closures in relation to a problematic global scale and the universal assumption of individual agency/rights highlight the necessity of democratising ‘actually existing’ discourses of global democracy. We explore these ideas via a discussion of the cultural governance of global trade and resistance to it, especially via the activities of a UK based anarchist group called *The Space Hijackers*. By deploying parody the Space Hijackers can contribute to the debate on global democracy by provoking reflection upon fundamental assumptions about globalisation and ethics in everyday situations. They therefore problematise and subvert the problematic subjectivity of the ‘global-individual’ in a manner that might (but does not necessarily) allow for the imagination of alternative possibilities. The importance of this argument is that it resists the tendency of post-structural scepticism with regard to ethical discourses of global democracy, while retaining what is so promising: a turn towards singularity and imagination. Parody does not solve all problems, what could? But it does offer a modality within which subjects can imagine and act creatively with regards to the everyday closures of global democracy.

**Keywords:** Global Democracy, Onto-Politics, Parody, Trade

---

<sup>1</sup> James Brassett is RCUK Fellow and Associate Professor in the Department of Politics and International Studies, University of Warwick. Chris Rossdale is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Politics and International Studies, University of Warwick.

## Introduction

Globalisation is often portrayed as a democratic question. What are the democratic implications of Ruggie's (1993) "unbundling" of the modern association between territoriality and political sovereignty? How can the liberal democratic compact between the individual and the state persist when the state cannot fully ensure socio-economic rights (Devetak and Higgott, 1999)? New political frameworks have emerged to address the democratic questions posed by globalisation (Bohman, 2007; Held, 1995; Held and McGrew, 2007). These approaches engage with, criticise, and develop the theoretical foundations of democracy, *per se*. And a common suggestion is that new forms of global governance should be anticipated above, below and regional to the state. Importantly, a key node of this debate is over the potential role of global civil society as an agent of democratic reform (Scholte, 2005).

While sympathetic to many of the guiding questions of this debate, we develop a critique of the representation of global democracy that emerges. We focus on the onto-politics of the debate to argue that it "contains fundamental presumptions that establish the possibilities within which its assessment of actuality is presented" (Connolly, Cf. Campbell, 2005: 128). In the case of liberal reformism, ontological assumptions regarding the necessity of institutions and natural beneficence of liberal trade relations underpin arguments for legitimacy. In the case of cosmopolitan democracy, ontological assumptions about the moral equality of individuals expressed through liberal autonomy and 'communities of fate', underpin a comprehensive program for global governance. In terms of democratic reform, liberals see more potential in the growth of international institutions and law, whereas cosmopolitans find more credibility in the growth of a democratic public sphere that capitalises on the innovative dynamism of global civil society (Smith and Brassett, 2008).

Accepting such limits, we argue that global democracy can be re-politicised via a greater level of critical engagement with the onto-politics, that is, the fundamental politics of the presumptions, of the debate itself: *What is global? What is governance? What is being governed?* That is to say, the category assumptions of the debate on global democracy can

themselves be opened up to greater levels of democratic debate. Importantly, we find that these questions, which are rarely addressed in the debate on global democracy, being seen as simply ‘anti’ or ‘outside’ the mainstream, are all actively engaged within anarchist circles of global civil society. We thus turn to an ‘actually existing’ cosmopolitan constituency in order to question the substantive ethico-political closures of global democracy.

In making this argument we depart from a common post-structural IR account of global democracy – and indeed cosmopolitanism – as a straightforward ‘narrative of escape’ (Shah, 2006; Vaughan-Williams, 2007; Walker, 2010). In its most recent articulation, this argument has seen Rob Walker accuse cosmopolitan democrats of failing to provide anything other than the standard set of aporias that condition all modern/sovereign thinking. He highlights the enduring centrality of binaries between humans and citizens, domestic and international (and world). While we take much inspiration from this and other interventions on the subject of global democracy, our suggestion is that such worthy critique is increasingly accompanied by a level of scepticism that inhibits genuine engagement, or even conversation (See also Brassett and Bulley, 2007). This is strange given what we see as the otherwise liberating implications of post-structural thought, particularly that, by dropping appeals to the possibility of a transcendent truth, we might begin to see world politics as contingency all *the way down*. Thus, for us at least, asking questions of right or wrong, new or old, optimistic or pessimistic, becomes increasingly redundant, and precisely for the reasons set up by post-structural thinkers, i.e. that all discourses are a product of contingency and qualities like ‘success’ or ‘failure’ are therefore always-already relative.<sup>2</sup> Instead, then, we are animated by pragmatic concerns like: What are the consequences of particular (discursive) practices? What limits are constructed? And how might we ‘contest’ or ‘go beyond’ such limits? In this sense, we prefer to present the discourse of global democracy as a performative practice. It is ongoing and consequential. Our concern is to pick at its logics, identify its possibilities and limits and in so doing, retain openness to what we see as most attractive in post-structural thought: an emphasis on singularity and imagination.

---

<sup>2</sup> For an elaboration of this argument and an expert defence by Rob Walker, see the forthcoming forum on ‘After the Globe, Before the World, in *Contemporary Political Theory*.

The paper is divided into four sections. Section 1 juxtaposes liberal and cosmopolitan approaches to the question of democratic global governance. Section 2 then draws out the onto-politics of this debate and makes the case for building a concept of ontological democracy into the discussion of democratic global governance. Section 3 elaborates this position via a discussion of the democratic governance of global trade. Cosmopolitans celebrate the potential for 'reflexive individuals' within global 'communities of fate' to subject unfettered trade relations to principles of fairness and inclusion. While sympathetic to this position, we argue that it carries an onto-political closure in relation to the elision of 'individual moralities' and an unquestioned 'global scale'. This is most acutely felt in the notion of fair trade where, to put it bluntly, individual consumers are asked to think and feel for the globe, to 'purchase' ethics. The individual and the global are thus cemented as an unquestionable ethical imaginary in a way that reifies both categories and silences alternative conceptions of scale or ethical responsibility. In short, new subjectivities are being performed. For us, these issues push the question of resistance and we therefore return to the much vaunted agency of 'global civil society' to suggest that its own ongoing practices may suggest rather more questions and possibilities than cosmopolitan democrats assume. Section 4 thus develops a case study of the London based anarchist group, *The Space Hijackers*, exploring their 'strategic' use of parody as both a political tactic and a means of engaging 'the political'.

While cosmopolitans provide good reasons to include a wide range of issues and actors within the discussion of global democracy they downplay profound disagreements within those constituencies. Global civil society is not some unitary agent of (partial) democratic reformism, but rather an arena of contest, disagreement and social learning. In particular, fundamental tensions over the universal scale of global trade cannot be resolved by appeals to individual autonomy, liberty and equality alone, or at all. We draw from the work of Judith Butler to argue that the politicisation of such tensions may itself be a productive way forward for the discussion of global democracy. We endorse a performative subversion in the activities of the Space Hijackers that a) celebrates the potential of parody to inform and contribute to the discussion of democratic global governance and b) promotes the (problematic) importance of the individual as both an agent and a site of global politics (Brassett and Holmes, 2010).

## 1. Liberal and cosmopolitan approaches to global democracy

This section first introduces the ‘mainstream’ debate on global democracy in terms of liberal and cosmopolitan approaches that focus on the shape and potentials of democratic global governance.<sup>3</sup> It suggests that the cosmopolitan self image that it is more ambitious than liberal reformism and thus more reflective of the complexity of globalisation as a social process is problematic. In onto-political terms, the global scale recognised by cosmopolitans is immediately and, we would argue, radically curtailed via the assumption of a universal normative logic, i.e. that, namely: providing a normative foundation for a global scale via the democratic critique of processes of globalisation, *per se*, is problematic, if not contradictory. We therefore question how and whether we might democratise the ontological assumptions of this debate in the next section.

Two approaches stand out in the discussion of democratising global governance: the liberal reformist position and the cosmopolitan democratic approach. At first glance, it might be suggested that the liberal position plays a more conservative card, seeking minimal standards of legitimacy which may, or may not have an impact on democratic ambitions (Buchanan and Keohane, 2006). This is especially so, if we tag the cosmopolitan approach with the ‘transformational-ist’ label, as it seeks to embed a complex scheme of “multi-layered” democratic governance and an enforceable system of global public law (Held, 1995). However, the differences of degree between the two hold out primarily in relation to fundamental values – e.g. liberals seek only minimal conceptions of the public good to cope with value pluralism (e.g. Rawls, 1999), whereas cosmopolitans engage more egalitarian commitments to the ‘equal moral status of persons’ with ‘active agency’ (e.g. Held) and ‘non-domination’ (e.g. Bohman, 2007). Such differences are perhaps less pronounced in relation to the final picture of global governance provided. While the relevant institutions, actors and processes are nominally

---

<sup>3</sup> Of course we acknowledge that such a heuristic entry point to the debate on global democracy runs the risk of ignoring or silencing other venerable and critical approaches, which is not our intention. As the Introduction stated, we are inclined to address Liberal and Cosmopolitan approaches primarily, not because we believe them to ‘be’ the mainstream of the debate, but because they are performatively inscribed in such terms via structures of knowledge, academic textbooks, reading lists, news journalism and so forth. We fully acknowledge that other more critical and less hegemonic approaches to this subject exist and make a good contribution to the task on undermining the ‘mainstream’ that we tentatively engage here. See *inter alia* Hardt and Negri, 2000; Phillips, 2005; Scholte, 2005; Vaughan-Williams, 2007. Our move is strategic then, not universal.

distinct across approaches, when cemented to their respective normative perspectives the ‘what’, ‘where’ and ‘when’ are largely taken as given.<sup>4</sup> Straightforwardly, each approach seeks a ‘model’ of global governance which yields a silence upon its onto-political foundations.

In liberal reformist fashion, Buchanan and Keohane (2006: 406) note the difficulties of building comprehensive global democratic institutions, but provide an account that leaves the door open to more transformative possibilities via the provision of reflexivity in relation to goals, interaction with external agents and a ‘principled global public standard of legitimacy’. For them, global governance institutions cover a large range of ‘multilateral organisations’ including the WTO, the IMF, the UN Security Council and the ICC. They accept that while global governance institutions can promote co-operation and regulatory frameworks, which limit the abuses of non-state actors, they can also act to constrain choices for societies or impose burdens: “states must belong to the WTO in order to participate effectively in the world economy, yet WTO membership requires accepting a large number of quite intrusive rules, authoritatively applied by its dispute settlement system.” (Ibid. 407). Thus, they argue, it is crucial to question whether particular institutions are perceived as legitimate because, “in a democratic era, multilateral institutions will only thrive if they are viewed as legitimate by democratic publics.” (Op. Cit.).

It is important to recognise that this reformist position does not impose a comprehensive conception of justice at the global level. This is because, at the global level, there is sufficient disagreement about what justice is that such a standard for legitimacy could potentially undermine what they regard as the reasonable goal of securing support for valuable institutions on a moral basis (Ibid. 412; See also Smith, forthcoming ). Equally, they suggest, invoking a comprehensive conception of justice might entail withholding support from an institution perceived as illegitimate. In a telling line they suggest, such a position: “would be self-defeating from the standpoint of justice itself, because progress

---

<sup>4</sup> In a sense, perhaps, such closures are a natural byproduct of the movement between ideal and non-ideal theory, or between ethical reflection and political practice. And we would not wish to suggest that authors such as Rawls, Buchanan and Held are unreflective of such issues. However, our suggestion is that the fact of the movement is potentially less interesting than the models which are constituted.



toward justice requires effective institutions. To mistake legitimacy for justice is to make the best the enemy of the good.” (Ibid. 412).

This approach has much to recommend it. Firstly, it clearly militates against an approach to the institutions of global governance which risks (further) imperialism via invoking comprehensive standards of the good. At the very least such an argument recognises the fact that on a global scale (perhaps more than at the domestic level) differing conceptions of justice are a fact of life. One global ethics is neither the reality, nor the goal for liberals. Secondly, it suggests that even if the WTO may be weak on questions of justice and normative legitimacy, with recurring questions about its inclusiveness, it may possess certain ‘goods’ which necessitate reform rather than rejection. Indeed, Keohane’s personal weighing of the legitimacy question in relation to the WTO expresses such a balance:

To imagine a world without the WTO or its equivalent is surely to imagine one that would be both poorer and more conflict-ridden. In my view, the WTO exceeds the threshold of legitimacy by a relatively comfortable margin, despite its coercive origins and some of its biased rules. Its reliance on quasi-judicial decision-making to resolve serious political-economic conflicts is a huge advance in multilateral cooperation, and promises more improvements in the future. And the WTO has helped to maintain liberal trade, which is manifestly beneficial on the whole. (Keohane, forthcoming).

From a cosmopolitan perspective such an approach is, no doubt, important. But what lacks from the discussion is both an engaged view of the structural transformations associated with globalisation and global governance, and a more *engaging* conception of democracy and democratic accountability (beyond formal legitimacy). Importantly, for this discussion, such a double emphasis turns to a (seemingly) highly elaborated politics of institutions. On a cosmopolitan view, the challenge is develop a multi-layered, multi-actor, multi-perspectival account of democratic governance in a global era.<sup>5</sup> This yields a critical position on liberal reformism: that liberals focus on extending pluralism to the global level, and, in the absence of electoral democracy, leave too much to basic

---

<sup>5</sup> Such ambitions for an institutional politics of global democracy can be read into the work of a number of authors who are variously more or less comfortable with the label ‘cosmopolitan’, e.g. Beck, 2006; Bohman, 2007; Scholte, 2005, etc. In what follows we focus on the word associated with Held and McGrew in order to temporarily fix ideas. On more deliberative approaches see Smith and Brassett, 2008.

procedural reforms (Held and McGrew, 2007: 158). For cosmopolitans, globalisation is itself the central issue, and their work responds to a set of perceived challenges to the nation-state model of democracy brought about by globalisation. They are therefore concerned with the ethical limits of liberalism imposed by globalisation.

The anticipation of autonomy for each and all constitutes a regulative idea – an idea which has guided conflicts over the institutionalization of democracy. It is an idea, moreover which has provided a normative standard which could be turned against existing institutions, as it has been by the working class, feminist, anti-racist and anti-colonial activists, to reveal the extent to which the principles and aspirations of equal liberty and equal political participation remain unfulfilled. (1995: 71).

The contemporary relevance of the principle of autonomy is that it can serve as a comprehensive critique of the potentially undemocratic aspects of global capitalism. As Held (Op. Cit.) affirms, it is “an idea which could be drawn upon to interrogate the degree to which democracy ‘made safe’ for the modern world has failed to address the problems of accountability created by sites of power beyond the state, such as those generated by leading economic organizations.” In this way, an argument for cosmopolitan democracy is tied directly to globalisation, defined as “[the] historical process which transforms the spatial organization of social relations and transactions, generating transcontinental or interregional networks of interaction and the exercise of power.” (Held & McGrew, 1998: 220).

What distinguishes cosmopolitanism is that it seeks to anticipate those immanent trends within contemporary globalising process that might foster more inclusive and accountable systems of global governance, e.g. the UN, the EU. As Held contends, “[t]he case for cosmopolitan democracy is the case for the creation of new political institutions” (Held, 1997: 12). Cosmopolitan democracy is therefore ‘global’ in the sense that it undermines straightforward appeals to fixed, territorial political communities associated with nation states. Instead it identifies numerous and overlapping ‘communities of fate’ that now exist in a supra-territorial context. And cosmopolitans seek to re-imagine the political basis of democracy by subjecting this complex global context to the normative principle of autonomy. This leads to various avenues including global institutional

reforms to promote accountability and inclusion, increased recognition of the potential contribution of global civil society actors, and the possibility of a cosmopolitan legal order.

## **2. Rendering global democracy as an onto-political question**

Developing from this brief summary of the main propositions of liberal and cosmopolitan approaches to global democracy, this second section will now address the ‘onto-politics’ of this debate. It first identifies a number of critical questions about the image of global democracy that emerges from liberal and cosmopolitan approaches. It then puts forward the idea of onto-politics and indeed the idea of ontological democracy as a way of further politicising global democracy. It draws on the work of William Connolly and Judith Butler to suggest that we can engage the onto-politics of global democracy not in terms of a rejection, but rather by way of an invitation to politicise and engage the category assumptions of democratic global governance, per se. This proposition is then developed via a discussion of the global governance of trade in section 3.

### *Onto-politics and Ontological Democracy*

To recall, a concern with the idea of into-politics is to develop from the insight of William Connolly and others like David Campbell who have extended the proposition that political arguments often (or always) contain fundamental presumptions that establish the possibilities within which their assessment of actuality is presented. In this vein, it is possible to develop some reflexive and critical points about liberal and cosmopolitan approaches to democratic global governance addressed in the first section.

Firstly, we might ask, how much is put in question? Each approach seeks to put one aspect of the ‘debate’ on global democracy – i.e. values or governance - on hold, while the other side is explored. On the liberal understanding values are not pre-determined and indeed restrictions are put in place on the capacity of actors or institutions to invoke comprehensive democratic conceptions. However, such reflexivity is not reflected in the

liberal analysis of global governance. Institutions are accorded a central place as both the repository of analysis and, subject to a subtle argument about (practical?) legitimacy, allowed to continue even in instances of borderline illegitimacy. Equally, and on the other hand, in the cosmopolitan understanding, global governance becomes a complex and overlapping web of spaces, actors and institutions. However, and certain qualifications withstanding, the model of cosmopolitan democracy ultimately then works with (and produces) a comprehensive conception of values - liberty & equality – which are extended to all people, everywhere. An apparently complex and contingent global scale is thus rendered to a pre-determined normative logic. In this sense, both approaches eschew universals in in one area while invoking them in another.

Secondly, both approaches suggest that globalisation presents a ‘straightforward’ reality, which we must respond to. In the case of Keohane ‘the WTO has helped to maintain liberal trade, which is manifestly beneficial on the whole.’ In the case of Held and McGrew, while great pains are taken to situate globalisation within a historical and political context, once defined, its empirical and normative logics flow ‘naturally’. This acceptance that globalisation ‘is some-thing’, which ‘does’ something, is problematic from the point of view of, for instance, a critical or constructivist approach to political economy. For such authors, globalisation is itself a constitutive discourse which engenders certain attitudes and logics (Rosamond, 2003). As such, when those attitudes or logics are either unquestionably accepted, or, rendered according to a particular normative position of advocacy, then it pushes the question: how do these new positions relate to all those people who don’t accept or agree with the discourse as it is constructed in the first place? In short, the concept of global democracy does not appear very democratic, even as it attempts to promote democracy in a ‘global realm’.

And finally, developing from the previous two points, we might ask, where is the ‘politics’ in democratic global governance? In both accounts examined, global governance appears as an institutional embodiment of a set of structural shifts in the spatial organisation of social life. ‘Politics’ in the sense of the open and acknowledged contest and contestability of that ‘life’ appear somewhat peripheral (Higgott, 2000). Even in the cosmopolitan perspective the crucial challenge is the ‘issues’ of newly emergent global

communities. While such a view clearly contests the ‘old’ frame of IR and political theory, such a contest arguably works to consolidate, rather than question, the founding assumptions of the cosmopolitan position (Walker, 2010). Seeking to ‘represent’ the diverse ‘communities of fate’ within multilayered global governance arguably does very little to address the instabilities, tensions, and political dissonances *between* and *within* those communities. In this sense, it is deeply problematic to invoke democratic arguments and promote democratic constituencies without reflecting upon the democratic content, i.e. the actual arguments and positions exhibited within, such constituencies. For instance, for some the (onto) politics of global governance might involve the overthrow of global capitalism. For others, the achievement of zero economic growth might be enough. And also, in the context of ‘large’ issues of democratic global governance, we might question what the role and scope of localising, de-linking and/or anarchistic social frames might be?<sup>6</sup>

To underline, this effort to identify an onto-political dimension is not intended to undermine or reject existing approaches to global democracy; rather it is to re-read them in a manner that might press the global democratic impulse further, in order to open up more fundamental ethical and political questions. As William Connolly argues:

Politics, at its best, is the medium through which essential ambiguities can be expressed and given some redress. It is simultaneously the best way to establish or confirm commonalities and to expose uncertainties, repressed voices, exclusions, and injuries lodged within them. Politics, again at its best, calls into question settlements sedimented into moral consensus, economic rationality, administrative procedure, legal propriety, psychiatric judgement, and ontological necessity. It enables cherished media of harmonization such as the self as subject, economic growth as a fundamental component of the good life, and the indispensability of political authority to be experienced simultaneously as mechanisms of normalization and as vehicles of realization.

**Under the right conditions, then, democracy politicizes and politics democratizes.** (Connolly, 1987: 16. Emphasis added.)

---

<sup>6</sup> Here it is illustrative of our more general point to consider the groundbreaking work of Jan Aart Scholte in relation to the question of ‘Building Global Democracy’. Rather than simply defining the problem in terms of collective action or capacity building efforts among activists, Scholte begins his inquiry from the point of view of asking a diverse range of activists, academics and policy makers to actually define what they understand by terms like ‘globalisation’ and ‘global democracy’, and then to debate such terms with each other. See <http://www.buildingglobaldemocracy.org/>

While we might favour the cosmopolitan urge to bring a more variegated range of actors and subjects within the realm of democratic global governance then, we think it is striking how many normative assumptions are then imputed to such subjects; they are in a 'community of fate', they should have their liberal 'autonomy defended', etc. The attempt to draw diverse subjects together in this way, couched under the universal normative intuition, may actually render such diversity in a pre- or over-determined manner? We therefore seek to 'call into question' these 'settlements sedimented into moral consensus, economic rationality, administrative procedure, legal propriety, psychiatric judgement, and ontological necessity'.

Judith Butler expresses this point in relation to feminist debates over the proper subject of political struggle. She argues that universalistic claims about a shared epistemological subject of womanhood have often come in for criticism because the category of woman is itself normative and exclusionary in relation to class and race, for instance (Butler, 1990: 19). Such a view, of course, leads to the familiar tensions of global ethics between the universal and the particular. While the cosmopolitan impulse to include a multiplicity of actors in a multi-layered and decentralised system of global governance might abrogate such concerns, Butler raises an important question about the (ironically) sovereign nature of such acts of engaged pluralism. She suggests that the feminist "insistence in advance on coalitional "unity" as a goal assumes that solidarity, whatever its price, is a prerequisite for political action." And asks: 'what sort of politics demands that kind of advance purchase on unity?' (Ibid. 20). She argues:

Perhaps a coalition needs to acknowledge its contradictions and take action with those contradictions intact. Perhaps also part of what dialogic understanding entails is the acceptance of divergence, breakage, splinter, and fragmentation as part of the often tortuous process of democratization.

[...]

It would be wrong to assume in advance that there is a category of "women" that simply needs to be filled in with various components of race, class, age, ethnicity, and sexuality in order to become complete. The assumption of its essential incompleteness permits that category to serve as a permanently available site of contested meanings. The definitional incompleteness of the category might then serve as a normative ideal relieved of coercive force. (Butler, 1990: 20-21)

Collecting these ideas together, the idea of ontological democracy can be animated if we take Butler's concern with an 'assumption of incompleteness' and allow the category foundations of democratic global governance to 'serve as a permanently available site of contested meanings'. Simply put, can we speak about 'governance' and 'global' in such terms, i.e. as incomplete, permanently available sites of contested meanings? If so what image would emerge and how would it differ from the current nexus between liberal reformism and cosmopolitan approaches to global governance? And what practical alterations to the image of democratic global governance might follow? In this sense, our aim is not to reject the terms of the debate on global democracy, but rather to politicise and engage them. In order to locate these theoretical questions we now turn to the substantive politics of global trade as one route towards an empirical realisation of these ethical issues and questions.<sup>7</sup>

### **3. The global governance of trade**

The previous sections mapped out the images of global democracy that emerges from the 'debate' between liberals and cosmopolitans on global governance. It was suggested that they each carry a silence on their onto-political assumptions regarding institutions and ethics. It was therefore argued that we might foster a more politicised debate if we were to open up and question the onto-politics of global democracy. Drawing from Connolly and Butler it was suggested that we might re-read interventions on democratic global governance by considering terms like 'global' and 'governance' as permanently available sites of contested meanings. In this sense, while the universal is always-already inscribed within debates on global democracy, this does not prevent us from recognising and engaging with its incompleteness. This section addresses these questions via a re-reading of democratic global governance on the subject of trade.

---

<sup>7</sup> Again, while we focus on global trade in this paper, it is clear that similar and fruitful discussions could be developed around the subject of global democracy in relation to areas like finance, security, the environment, etc. As such, it is fair to underline our more general sense that for all its limitations cosmopolitanism provides a ready arsenal of interesting and worthy subjects of analysis and research. In this sense, we agree with the social theorist Robert Fine (2003: 466) when he suggests that "for all the defects of the new cosmopolitanism *as a doctrine*, I would conclude by saying that today cosmopolitan thinking plays an indispensable part in the social sciences and that this makes it all the more urgent, as it were, to take the 'ism' out of the cosmopolitan." In this sense, cosmopolitanism is rendered as an ongoing and consequential practice to be engaged.

In Buchanan and Keohane's usage governance is simply a form of institutional decision making. It manifests in multilateral organisations like the WTO which embody many of the ontological assumptions now in question. The WTO is 'global' in that it is made up of the majority of the states in the world, thus positing a state-centric ontology of globalisation. It is also global in that it has upheld and fostered liberal trade which is manifestly beneficial 'on the whole.' To their credit, Held and McGrew blur this concentration of (ontological) powers. Governance is understood in more continuous terms as effective forms of social steering mechanisms. On this view, governance is about forms of effective public decision making, which may hail from a large array of (public and private sites).<sup>8</sup>

From a cosmopolitan perspective, the governance of global trade enlists a wide range of actors including the WTO, but also states who enact bilateral agreements; regional organisations such as the EU and the FTAA; importantly non-state actors such as multinational corporations play an important role in the governance of production, pricing and also revenue distribution; more critically, citizen organisations and NGOs play an important role in publicising the impact of global trade on rural communities and the environment; and finally, the individual in the guise of the consumer increasingly exercises a governance role over trade that reclaims 'some' degree of political influence via consumption choices, ethical consumerism and lobbying of companies/consumer groups, etc (See also Gaffney, 2010). In many ways, this schema provides an important and challenging cut at the global governance of trade, not least when compared to the more instrumentalist version of trade governance that dominates in liberal economic and managerial analyses, say.<sup>9</sup>

However, from the point of view of 'ontological democracy' a different set of points emerge that focus on how particular assumptions about the governance of global trade are maintained, and how they might be politicised. David Campbell (2003: 57) argues that

---

<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, see Prichard (2010) for a discussion about the differences and similarities between Held's approach here (and elsewhere), and anarchism.

<sup>9</sup> For a typical flavour of the literature on global trade see Hoekman, B., and Kostecki, M. (2001)



If we assume that the state has no ontological status apart from the many and varied practices that bring it into being, then the state is an artefact of a continual process of reproduction that performatively constitutes its identity. The inscription of boundaries, the articulation of coherence, and the identification of threats to its sense of self can be located in and driven by the official discourses of government. But they can equally be located in and driven by the cultural discourses of the community, and represented in sites as ‘unofficial’ as art, film and literature. While such cultural locations are often taken to be the sites of resistance to practices of government, their oppositional character is neither intrinsic nor guaranteed. Indeed, states have often engaged in or benefited from practices of cultural governance.

We would argue that the governance of global trade depends on just such a system of cultural production and by identifying and highlighting them it is also then possible to think of them as ‘sites of resistance’. If governance is about *shaping* social life then beyond institutions and actors, which clearly engender ontological assumptions, a whole realm of cultural forms may warrant consideration (See Lisle, 2008). Influential representations of global trade permeate our 24hr media now in a way that blurs public and private. Theatrical news depictions of powerful men making tough decisions at the WTO, the general and widespread reduction of the debate on trade to a normative dichotomy between openness (read good) and protectionism (read bad), and TV chefs who encourage the use of globally sourced products all play a role in making global trade what Connolly describes as ‘a fundamental component of the good life’.

Indeed, while Butler posits a hetero-normativity to gender, we might posit a trade-normativity to discourses of global trade governance? Turning to the prominent example of ethical trade, for instance, the norm has been to affirm, rather than leave ‘incomplete’, subjectivities such as the consumer, the producer, and ‘the global’ (Brassett and Holmes, 2010). In particular, we would highlight the concept (and brand) ‘fair trade’ which emerged and developed as an important attempt to subject the trade relation to a form of social regulation, a form of cosmopolitan governance. The idea that a higher price is paid to farmers in exchange for a cup of coffee, say, was celebrated by many as an important, if piecemeal, intervention in the governance of global trade. However, the ambiguities of such ethical trade governance require scrutiny.

On the one hand, numerous scholars have raised doubts over the role of profit motives involved in what they see as the fair trade branding exercise. As Mat Watson (2007: 265) has argued, “fair trade works within the structures of market exchange, thereby reinforcing their dominance” and while the act of ethical consumption may be seen as a form of ‘beneficence’ towards distant farmers, no reciprocal relations are engendered:

Despite the best efforts of fair trade campaigners to de-anonymize the trading relationship, this has been a decidedly one-way process which works only to the benefit of the consumer. First World consumers are provided with information about the type of Third World producer with whom they are trading. This enables them to reconstruct the context of Third World livelihood struggles in their own minds and, as such, to confer sympathy on the emotions that they presume the producers will feel. But this same sort of imaginative projection into another person’s life context is not also conferred upon the producers.

In the case of Starbucks, for instance, consumers are told that the cup of coffee they are buying is sourced according to the ‘highest ethics’, that the cup of coffee is not only good quality but also ‘responsible’. In this way, the ethical consumer is confronted with a question about global ethics which simultaneously constructs the global as a *pre-existent reality*, demanding of certain ethical decisions. And, as well as the often, frankly, patronising depictions of indigenous farmers, smiling and humble in receipt of Starbucks trade, the individual qua consumer is constructed as an unquestioned site for the adjudication of global responsibilities.

On the other hand, the cultural governance of global trade via fair trade sets up a problematic ontology of global ethics that requires reflection. We identify three central issues. Firstly, a global imaginary is constructed which posits an ‘Us’ and ‘Them’ dichotomy in opposition to the universalist impulses of cosmopolitans. The use/performance of such dichotomies means that democracy comes to be understood and addressed in terms of a divide between strong and responsible subject/citizen and a weak and helpless subject/potential recipient. As Debbie Lisle (2008: 158) argues, “. . . there is always a privileged subject who extends a helping hand to an already subordinate and victimised Other, and in the process entrenches the very inequalities s/he is trying to alleviate.” Secondly, developing from established (Marxist) questions of International

Political Economy, we can raise concerns about the potential to reify the global trade relation itself. Simply put, in the movements to ‘ethically’ ‘respond to’ globalisation, global trade is taken as given, save for the requirement to legitimise it in some way. Problems then relate to the effacement of onto-political questions relating to the construction of trade relations, e.g. the privileging of large single product export markets over diverse and subsistence agrarian systems; the privileging of ‘large’ trade and economic growth over the environment, etc. And finally, returning to the ‘ethical consumer’, there is an interesting double-think, which both individualises and totalises the consumer as the ethical subject par excellence. In a sense, we would argue, the individual consumer becomes the site of global ethics in a way which targets modes of consumption, rather than trade itself.<sup>10</sup>

The (cultural) performativity of trade governance implies that ethical intervention is problematised *all the way down*. Democratising institutions performs the centrality of those institutions for global democracy, something that we might question (not least) of environmental grounds. Even attempting more piecemeal interventions such as ethical consumerism risks cementing a problematic ethical imaginary which pits the individual (western) consumer as agent of global ethics. However, in constructive terms, we would suggest that actually recognising such difficulties is an important step in recognising the genuine responsibilities entailed in the discussion of global democracy. Moreover, we would actually suggest that the task of denaturalising the unquestioned global scale and the centrality of individual moralities in debates on global democracy may be inherent in certain elements of the much vaunted ‘constituency’ of global civil society. Whereas cosmopolitan democrats tranquilise the differences between global civil society activists, by imputing a universal normative logic, we would suggest that the distinction between, say, a global NGO like Greenpeace and a localising and/or delinking grassroots movement is acutely significant. In short, we think, the radical differences between global civil society activists represent an interesting and productive arena for engaging the onto-politics of global governance.

---

<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, and somewhat echoing Debbie Lisle’s (2008) important work on travel guides as a form of cosmopolitan imperialism, we note the publication of the *Rough Guide to Ethical Living* as one mode by which onto-political foundation of the ethical consumer is produced.

#### 4. Performative Subversion: A Case Study of The Space Hijackers

The previous section set up the essential problematic that this final section will address via a case study of The Space Hijackers: how can we democratise/politicise the category foundations of global democracy? This problematic is both a practical question of how we reflect upon our role and responsibilities within global trade and an ambiguous ethical conundrum: what, if anything, can actually be done? Our suggestion is that beyond the straightforward depictions of global civil society as an agent of universal norms, or even a counter-hegemonic force, there is much that can be learnt about the substantive politics of global democracy.<sup>11</sup>

In her discussion of ‘drag culture’ Butler argues that, in “imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency” (1990; 187). While parody can only serve this subversive role in a problematic way – i.e. it is always subject to potential appropriation via market mechanisms or hegemonic culture - she celebrates its potential, arguing that: “In place of the law of heterosexual coherence, we see sex and gender denaturalized by means of a performance which avows their distinctness and dramatizes the cultural mechanism of their fabricated unity.” (1990: 187-188). We argue that parody is deployed within global civil society as a technique to subvert the ‘fabricated unities’ of global democracy discussed in previous sections. However, importantly, we find that the subversion is ambiguous.

On the one hand, the Space Hijackers target the very spaces – individuals, shops, corporations – that might be identified as the fulcrum of the ontological governance of global trade. In this way, the individual might be highlighted and engaged as both an agent and site of global ethics. On the other hand, while the Space Hijackers clearly subvert the assumed ‘normalities’ of global democracy, they equally consolidate certain onto-political norms. This is most evident in their desire to make Starbucks stock fair

---

<sup>11</sup> In this sense, we depart from the common and popular depiction of global civil society as an ‘agent’ for some ethical goal, be it democracy, or justice of some hue. Instead we reflect on the ways in which activities and discussions within global civil society – understood more as an arena – are of ethical and affective significance in their own terms. In short, the harnessing of global civil society campaigns to ‘larger models’ of global democracy has (ironically) often gone hand in glove with the concomitant underestimation of the ethical (and democratic) significance of the actual content of global civil society, *per se*.

trade coffee. On the argument of the previous section then, at the same time as they subvert the unquestioned global scale then, they also further instantiate it in their support of the idea that the individual consumer can act as a site of global ethics. In this sense, they highlight the more general proposition of our argument that unproblematic answers on global democracy do not exist, but for us this only raises the issue of (the responsibility to imagine) how we might identify and raise further questions.

### *The Space Hijackers*

Using the label ‘Anarchitects’, the Space Hijackers (who have elsewhere described themselves as a ‘bandit group of drunken misfits’ and as ‘trouble with an anti-capital t’)<sup>12</sup> seek to reclaim conceptual and physical spaces from the mechanisms of control set in place by the demands of capital. They argue that, within modern capitalism,

people have become units to be directed and physically moved around space. The state creates a system within which we move and live, a functional space on a massive scale, [which operates] on a psychological as well as physical level. Space is designed to affect our moods, and put us into the frame of mind that companies require in order to be in a position to compete with their rivals (SH Manifesto).

Assumptions about space and scale are often underexposed in the debate on global democracy. Challenging this, the Space Hijackers locate themselves within the common and everyday experiences of global trade. They concern themselves with issues such as the way in which global corporations have used research on consumer habits to learn about which direction consumers are more likely to turn after walking into a store (right); to understand that if smaller tiles are set into a shop store then shopping trolleys will clatter more and consumers will slow down to buy more (often such tiling is next to the highest mark up products); and to understand that specific types of music, colour and lighting will motivate individuals to buy specific products (SH Manifesto). For the Space Hijackers, this technology operates on a subconscious level: the language of corporate space is designed to operate quietly but insistently. They therefore seek to uncover the

---

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.spacehijackers.org>

ethico-political foundations of global trade, to “corrupt the culture of architecture, and destroy the hierarchies that exist” (SH Manifesto).

In the past, this has been done in a variety of ways. They have held parties on the Circle Line of the London Underground, walked around TopShop, Gap and other multinational retail stores wearing T-Shirts with “50% Off Everything” written on the front (causing genuine chaos),<sup>13</sup> removed adverts on the London Underground (replacing them with a small sticker inviting commuters to enjoy the company of others or themselves - rather than spending their mornings reading corporate messages),<sup>14</sup> and they regularly play Anarchist vs. Capitalist midnight cricket games in the financial district of London. These cricket games, generally instigated through taunting capitalists in city bars (both for their poor career choices and their poor cricket skills), represent on one level a destabilisation of the ontological foundations of corporate space, which is supposed to be used for working or shopping, not for political games of cricket (often accompanied by alcohol, nudity, and severely bemused security guards). The Space Hijackers therefore pull ‘the Capitalists’ into an active dialogue about the way in which we engage with corporate structures around us. Indeed, in participating in the performance themselves, the Capitalists undermine the very discursive foundations upon which they will rely at 9am the following morning. On top of this, the act of dialogue demands from ‘the Capitalists’ (and from the Space Hijackers themselves) answers about those very assumptions of cultural and political governance which are routinely hidden from everyday social practice. ‘The Capitalists’ are removed from their ontological safehouse, the foundations of their belief systems made insecure by the simple act of having fun where they are not supposed to.<sup>15</sup> As the Space Hijacker report from a match in 2008 states, “it was whilst watching the capitalist captain attempt somersaults on a makeshift trampoline as the security called up at him that we realised anarchy had indeed won again!”<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> <http://spacehijackers.org/html/projects/halfprice07/halfprice.html>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.spacehijackers.org/html/projects/tubeadverts/april.html>

<sup>15</sup> <http://spacehijackers.org/html/projects/midnight7thtest/midnightcricket.html>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.spacehijackers.org/html/projects/midnight6thtest/index.html>. It is important to note the links between the Space Hijackers' actions and philosophies, and the Situationists. See especially Vaneigem (2006: 190-203).

One of their more prominent acts of parody has been the decision to purchase a tank that they tried to sell outside an arms fair in 2007. Aside from the general impact that the authorities seem to be quite concerned about the notion of a group of anarchists with a tank, they also raise the important issue that we currently allow a global arms trade where almost anyone can sell weapons to anyone with a minimum of regulation. In this performance, as in others, the Space Hijackers made those authorities which served to prohibit their actions complicit in the subversion. While they publically purchased one tank, allowing it to be impounded by waiting police officers on the exit from their garage a secret second tank was able to arrive at the arms fair on time, catching the police unawares. We might wonder whether the police who attempted to impound the tanks questioned the absurdity of their actions, spending time and resources chasing a group of sniggering anarchists around London whilst international arms dealers, infamous for their own elaborate legal manoeuvres, conducted business in relative security.<sup>17</sup>

The Space Hijackers seek to resist by highlighting what they see as latent common sense about the absurdities of the global market system, evident when playing a ‘forbidden’ game of cricket, or trying to flog a tank to the highest bidder. When they held a ‘swap shop’ inside a London branch of Topshop, they sought to provoke questions about the limitations placed on the use of space within corporate environments. Their sustainable, cheap and more interactionist use of the location was manifestly incompatible with the demands of capital.<sup>18</sup> Unlike traditional Marxist conceptions of resistance as way to educate people about their ‘real’ or ‘objective’ interests the Space Hijackers seek to avoid ‘preaching’, or a perception that they are in some way more ‘enlightened’ than those shopping in TopShop or Gap. In meetings, they regularly check themselves, discarding ideas that establish a hierarchical relationship between them and ‘the public’ (fieldwork 2009). Instead, they seek to confuse the onto-political logic of trade by offering alternative stories and meanings which can exist within a space, seeking to unbalance “the

---

<sup>17</sup> Our suggestion is, of course, not that the police ‘did in fact’ wonder in such terms, rather that the subversion highlighted an aspect of the onto-politics of the situation that might otherwise have been buried far deeper. The police might equally have been bored by the event, or angry that their manager had sent them here rather than an area of genuine crime that affects real people. The police may also have been union members holding strong anti-arms views. All this is simply to say that by posing such questions we might break the traditional sedimentations of political imagination and begin to think outside the ‘us and them’ categories through which much democratic and even more radical politics is structured.

<sup>18</sup> <http://spacehijackers.org/html/projects/swapshop/index.html>

authority of the owner's text" (SH Manifesto) by instigating a confusion of conversations. For example, while the London Underground is initially constructed – and ontologically unquestioned – as a site for sitting and reading adverts, the Space Hijackers confuse this by replacing the adverts, or by (famously) holding parties on the trains, offering a plurality of meanings, and suggesting the potential for a more democratic, and contested approach to the logics of trade and space. This is done in a way which consciously undermines the onto-political foundations of the existing order:

if we are to change the way the world is, we can't play by the same rules [as global capitalism], as we will obviously lose. However these rules, the architecture and systems that oppress us, are all formed through language. This language is something that exists solely within the heads of the people that use it. If we change the language, we change the game. We mess with the system as opposed to simply feeding it (SH Manifesto).

The Space Hijackers thus seek to parody the onto-political assumptions of global capitalism. They don't seek to force change, instead, they beg the public to question why they don't want change, politicising the most basic onto-political assumptions of (how we perform) global trade. They see themselves as enacting "a method of change as opposed to another revolutionary ideal" (SH Manifesto). It would be shortsighted, however, to suggest that the Space Hijackers make no moves towards an ethical reconstruction. Through their actions, they suggest the immanent reality of a better world, not within, but *just* outside of the present. When they use corporate space to play cricket (rather than to work, or to consume) they destabilise its ontological foundations, provoking dialogue about the way in which we engage with corporate structures around us. Why shouldn't we have a party on the tube? Why should particular groups be allowed to buy and sell weapons? Why should we shop in chain-stores when there are charity shops around the corner?

Resisting the common impulse to outline a utopia, the Space Hijackers seek to provoke the imagination of alternatives, and in doing so they further undermine hegemonies of cultural governance (*and, indeed, the ontological foundations of governance as a hegemonic concept*). There are limitations to such an approach; the well-recognised tendency for forms of resistance to be appropriated as culture is an ongoing issue for groups like the Space



Hijackers. One example of this comes from the famous Underground Circle-Line parties, which motivated independent parties and other counter-culture events (dinner parties on the train etc) – evidence that the corruption of cultural hegemony had made positive impacts. However, there are signs that the ‘counter-culture’ impulse has been appropriated by capitalist institutions, with the Ministry of Sound converting trains into clubs to take people to their New Year party.<sup>19</sup>

Likewise, it cannot be ignored that the Space Hijackers also perform certain limits in their campaigns. For instance, as well as provoking people to reflect upon the possibility of localised forms of production in certain areas, they also criticise the absence of fair trade products within Starbucks. This potentially ‘limited’ criticism comes alongside concerns about the gentrification and cultural homogeneity which they believe accompany the introduction of Starbucks to a locale, suggesting that their aim is not a dedicated dislocation of all onto-political norms, but is perhaps a more focussed attack on the encroachments of institutions like Starbucks on ‘the local’, as a potential starting point for thinking about the global.

In one meeting, after finding out that Starbucks refuses to allow photography in its coffee shops because it has patented ‘the atmosphere’ inside its chain stores, various methods of parody were suggested, ranging from replacing the ubiquitous pictures of smiling farmers picking coffee for satisfied Starbucks customers with sad faces (or perhaps stickers warning that the picture may not represent "actual happy farmers") to corrupting the atmosphere by placing rotten fish behind radiators (from fieldwork 2009). The focus remains on the local as the site of parody, as the site of undermining the onto-politics of the global, somewhat marginalising (or placing to one side) the potential for a more holistic parody of global trade. This was made evident when, in an effort to undermine Starbucks’ changing logo (which originally showed the famous mermaid unabashedly topless, but which, in an apparent effort to secure universal and global appeal, now shows the mermaid with hair covering her breasts), the Space Hijackers replaced the

---

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.music-news.com/ShowNews.asp?nCID=0&H=Ministry-of-Sound-offer-the-tube-a-NYE-makeover&nItemID=30894>

nipples on a Starbucks store in Whitechapel.<sup>20</sup> Manifestly silly, the small action sought to introduce an element of individuality and creativity apparently unachievable through the trade mechanisms within which Starbucks operates.

It might be tempting to deny the possibility of resistance within a system that so effectively appropriates symbols of anti-hegemonic action, or at least to insist that broad systems of control must be confronted before any positive impact is achievable. However, as noted, the Space Hijackers are not interested in instructing or influencing ‘the masses’ to have a party on the tube (indeed it could be said that holding a ‘Space Hijackeresque’ party misses the point entirely); their concern is with provoking an attitude of scepticism towards any fixed programme of how space should be used, favouring contingency and creativity over sedimentation and homogenisation. Their philosophy, a “method” rather than an “ideal”, is based around the long-standing anarchist insistence upon prefiguration, the belief that ‘future society’ will be determined by how we act in the present, and insisting that “there is no distinction between how we fight and what we fight for...the struggle and the goal, the real and the ideal, becomes one in the present” (Maeckelbergh 2009: 66-67).<sup>21</sup> When they subvert logics of global trade in fun and creative ways then, this is because they favour a fun and creative world. Their non-hierarchical and grassroots organisation prefigures a non-hierarchical and grassroots world.

The politics of prefiguration are often complex. Within the positivities of the Space Hijackers’ resistance runs an internal ambiguity about the appropriate sites for ethical action. Their support for fair-trade and their actions convincing shoppers not to buy from shops with poor labour records suggests the placing of the consumer as an important site of ethical agency. Likewise, when protesting against Clarion, an events company which owns the DSEi Arms Fair, they tried to convince members of the public attending a separate Clarion event - the Baby Show - to spend their time elsewhere.<sup>22</sup> Nonetheless most members of the Space Hijackers would probably reject the suggestion

---

<sup>20</sup> <http://spacehijackers.org/html/projects/whitechapelstar/nipples.html>

<sup>21</sup> See also Richard Day (2005) and David Graeber (2009).

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.spacehijackers.org/html/projects/dseibabies/thebabyshow.html>

that specific patterns of consumption are ‘the problem’, and would look to the more fundamental logics of capitalism and/as/or global trade.

This ambiguity rests on a tension between the dangers of pushing the consumer as too-central a site of ethical agency and the anarchistic preference for “continually pressing against the society in search of its weak-points and trying to open areas that would make revolutionary change possible” (Bookchin 1989: 135). In this sense, the Space Hijackers could be seen to be engaging in a tactical resistance which refuses the Marxian strategic logic of one single site of power and of resistance in favour of a conception which favours a multiplicity of resistances (May 1994). Such trends accord with the sense of ongoing existential crisis that enters into Space Hijacker discussions: wondering whether people ‘get’ what they are doing, whether it is changing things for the better, whether the Space Hijackers should even carry on as a group (from fieldwork 2009). These are not necessarily related to any particular pessimism. Rather, they suggest an ongoing understanding that the resistance is necessarily localised and contextual, and that there will come a time when it is no longer worth pursuing in its current forms.<sup>23</sup>

### **Conclusion: the politics of global democracy**

In cosmopolitan democracy, much ethical ground is covered beyond the policy oriented practicality of liberal reformism. However, certain subjects – the global, communities of fate, and the (ethical) individual – have been asserted at the risk overshadowing their ‘incompleteness’ as sites of ‘contested meanings’. In the case of the democratic governance of global trade, cosmopolitan democracy may overlook foundational tensions over what is global, what is governance, and, ultimately, what is the appropriate site of ethics? From the point of view of ontological democracy, such tensions should be opened up and explored. Such trends can be observed in the use of parody as a strategy of resistance by The Space Hijackers. In this way, we argue, the politics of global

---

<sup>23</sup> There are potential similarities between this approach and Hakim Bey's 'Temporary Autonomous Zone', both ideas which embrace the potential to find and enjoy a situation of spontaneity and autonomy without the demands (and totalising possibilities) of always insisting upon permanence and sedimentation (Bey 2003: 95-132).

governance can move beyond the standard questions of collective action or counter hegemony to realise the politics of ontology.

In making this argument we stress that we do not want to overstate the capacity of parody to subvert the founding logics of global democracy. While we are clearly attracted to its strategic qualities and its clearly cultural origins, i.e. a local set of social rules that the British understand particularly well, such attractions are also, at the same time limits of their own. As we have argued elsewhere parody and humour can also serve a tranquilising purpose (Brassett, 2009). While it can make one anarchist excited, it can seem like an un-profound shrug of the shoulders to the more enwisened structural Marxist. Equally, the policeman who has to deal with 'anarchist tanks' on sale at cheap prices might well 'laugh with', while locking up and moving on. We therefore posit it as one modality – among many – which just so happens to form an interesting sounding board for a number of anarchist themes in the discussion of ethics and democracy.

Anarchist theories of resistance are varied, complex, and often contradictory - many would argue that this is to their immense credit (Day 2005; Graeber 2009; Gordon 2008). The importance of celebrating a 'diversity of tactics' has been central to modern anarchism; the capacity for different individuals, groups and movements to act in the manner they see fit is held to be more important than the insistence on a totalising doctrine of resistance contained within other radical theories (which, anarchists argue, are liable to replicate the totalising closures opposed). In this sense, anarchists are particularly well-placed to articulate a resistance which engages in a politics which simultaneously undermines, subverts and confronts existing onto-political positions while practicing and producing non- (or anti-) totalising alternatives (Rossdale 2010).

Parody might occupy an interesting position here. As Simon Critchley notes, there is a significant trend in modern anarchist movements which employs humour as a means to exercising "a satirical pressure on the state in order to show that other forms of life are possible." He argues that "it is the exposed, self-ridiculing and self-undermining character of these forms of protest that [is] most compelling as opposed to the pious humourlessness of most forms of vanguardist active nihilism" (2008: 124). In short,

humour and parody might form one (problematic) part of an anarchist resistance which seeks to destabilise dominant onto-political perspectives, which does so creatively, and yet which at all times recognises the danger of forming new totalities, new onto-political closures. Parody carries with it the virtue of a perpetual self-undermining, a 'tactical frivolity' in Critchley's terms, which, whilst limited in important ways, might be an important tool in pursuing onto-political critiques which avoid, and perhaps even mock, the impulse to apply new universal normative logics.

The Space Hijackers provide an example of how such parody might be advanced. Their resistance, as discussed, might be seen as a continuous politicisation of the onto-politics of global trade, a laying bare the foundational logics obscured by much of cosmopolitan and liberal discussion on the matter. Nonetheless their parody is not without its creative and prescriptive trends; what differentiates such prescription from the appeals to legitimacy found in liberal accounts, or from the universal normative standards of many cosmopolitans, is the localised focus and the desire to inspire others to create spaces for their own explorations. It is a prescription founded in non-prescription, an onto-political disrupture which unmask contingency not in order to establish further, different closures, but in order to demonstrate the possibilities for other narratives and practices of trade. They do not seek to enact a new regime of onto-politics, but a continuous democratisation of the terms of global trade and global governance, a politicisation which goes further than much of the current mainstream debate.

## Bibliography

- Beck, U. 2006. *Cosmopolitan vision*, trans. Ciaran Cronin, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bohman, J. (2007) *Democracy Across Borders: From Dêmos to Dêmoi*, Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press.
- Brassett, J. and Bulley, D. (2007) Ethics in World Politics: Cosmopolitanism and Beyond?' in *International Politics*, 2007, 44(1):1-18
- Brassett, J. and Smith, W. (2010) 'Deliberation and Global Civil Society: Agency, Arena, Affect' in *Review of International Studies*
- Brassett, J. and Holmes, C. (2010) 'International Political Economy and the Question of Ethics' in *Review of International Political Economy*
- Buchanan, A. and R. O. Keohane, (2006) 'The Legitimacy of Global Governance Institutions', *Ethics and International Affairs*, 20(4), 405-437.
- Butler, J. (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge.
- Campbell, D. (2003) 'Cultural governance and pictorial resistance: reflections on the imaging of war.' *Review of International Studies* 29:57-73.
- Campbell, D. 2005. Beyond Choice: The Onto-politics of Critique. *International Relations* 19(1): 127-134.
- Connolly, W. (1987) *Politics and Ambiguity*. University of Wisconsin Press.
- Critchley, S. (2008) *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance*. London: Verso.
- Dahl, R. A. (1999) 'Can international organizations be democratic? A sceptic's view', in I. Shapiro & C. Hacker-Cordón (eds.) *Democracy's Edges*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Devetak, R. and Higgott, R. (1999) Justice Unbound? Globalisation, States and the Transformation of the Social Bond. *International Affairs* 75(3):493-598.
- Dryzek, J. S. (2006) *Deliberative Global Politics: Discourse and Democracy in a Divided World*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Fine, R. (2003) 'Taking the "Ism" out of Cosmopolitanism: An Essay in Reconstruction', *European Journal of Social Theory* 6(4): 451-70.
- Gaffney, E. (2010) A Critical Interrogation of Corporate Social Responsibility and Global Distributive Justice Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, University of Warwick.
- Habermas, J. (2001): *The Postnational Constellation: Political Essays*, trans. Max Pensky, Cambridge Mass.: Polity.
- Held, D. (1995) *Democracy and the Global Order: From the Modern State to Cosmopolitan Governance*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Held (1997)
- Held, D. and McGrew, A. (1998) The End of the Old Order? Globalization and the Prospects for World Order. *Review of International Studies* 24(5):219-245.
- Held, D and McGrew, A. (2002) "Introduction." In *Governing Globalization: Power Authority and Global Governance*, edited by Held, D and McGrew, pp. 1-21. Cambridge: Polity Press
- Held, D. and McGrew, A. (2007) *Globalization/ Anti-Globalization: Beyond The Great Divide*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Higgott, R. (2000) 'Contested Globalisation: Changing Contexts and Normative Challenges' *Review of International Studies*, 26, 2000: 131-154.
- Hoekman, B., and Kostecki, M. (2001) *The Political Economy of the World Trading System: The WTO and Beyond*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Keohane, R. 'Legitimacy and Global Governance' in *Review of International Political Economy*, forthcoming
- Laclau, E. and Mouffe, C. (2001) *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (Verso, 2nd Edition)
- Linklater, A. (1998) *The Transformation of Political Community: ethical foundations of the post-Westphalian era*. Oxford: Polity.
- Lisle, D. (2008) 'Humanitarian Travels: Ethical Communication in Lonely Planet Guidebooks,' *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 34, pp. 155-172.
- Newell, P. 'Democratising biotechnology? Deliberation, participation and social regulation in a neo-liberal world' in *Review of International Studies*, forthcoming.
- Rawls, J. (1999) *The Law of Peoples, With "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited"*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Rosamond, B. (2003) 'Babylon and On: Globalization and International Political Economy.' *Review of International Political Economy* 10(4): 661-671.
- Rossdale, C. (2010) 'Anarchy is What Anarchists Make of It: Reclaiming the Concept of Agency in IR and Security Studies', *Millennium: Journal of International Relations*, 39(2), forthcoming.
- Ruggie, J. (1993) 'Territoriality and Beyond: Problematizing Modernity in International Relations,' *International Organization*, 46
- Shah, Nisha. 2006. 'Cosmopolitanizing and Decosmopolitanizing Globalization: Metaphorical Description and Transformations of Political Community.' *Globalizations* 3(3): 393-412.
- Smith, W. 'Deliberation Beyond Borders: The Public Reason of a Society of Peoples' in *Journal of International Political Theory*, forthcoming.
- Smith, W. and Brassett, J. (2008) 'Deliberation and Global Governance: Liberal, Cosmopolitan and Critical Perspectives' in *Ethics and International Affairs*
- Vaughan-Williams, N. (2007) 'Beyond a Cosmopolitan Ideal: The Politics of Singularity', *International Politics* 44(1): 107-24.
- Walker, R. B. J. *After the Globe, Before the World*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Watson, M. (2007) 'Trade Justice and Individual Consumption Choices: Adam Smith's Spectator Theory and the Moral Constitution of the Fair Trade Consumer', *European Journal of International Relations*, 13(3).